The Wayback Machine - https://web.archive.org/web/20020725071554/http://communitypresbyterian.com:80/sermons/52602.htm

Ephesians: How We Become Different

Ephesians 2:4-7

Thomas Michael Smith
CPC 5/26/02

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

Two weeks ago we left off with discovering that we were *made alive with Christ* by his grace, and by the work of salvation which he accomplished, and we discovered that we were *raised up with Christ* but, like Jesus, with a new power, the power of the Holy Spirit, and like Christ, this new life given to us also propelled us back into the world, back to business. I told you that being alive with Christ and being raised up with Christ had the combined effect of enabling us to be substantively different than we were before Christ came into our lives.

There are four ways in which the true Christian is able to act that are impossible for those who are without Christ. I am not here to tell you whether or not you are a Christian, though I believe that we have people in our sanctuary on a regular basis who have not embraced Christ as their savior. For those people my words are educational but have no particular encouragement or exhortation because without Christ one doesn't have the Holy Spirit inside, and without the Holy Spirit, it's just completely impossible to grasp the spiritual things of God. For those whom Christ has claimed as his own, there are four ways in which you can now act if you allow the power of the Spirit to flow through you. You may love the unlovable, endure the unendurable, achieve the unachievable, and forgive the unforgivable.

In any case, the first now-possible act for the Christian is the ability to love those who were absolutely unlovable to them before. Many a spouse has told me that she or he had reached such a state of estrangement in the marriage that the other was literally hated. "I couldn't stand the sight of her,' or 'I couldn't abide his presence.' But after the spouse became a Christian, a new relationship was born. Despite struggles (which we all have) the new Christian began to look at the spouse in a new way, and actually begin to love. It happens this way with young people and their parents -- after coming to Christ, a new sense of appreciation and understanding and love for parents begins to bloom. With Christ inside, we tend to look at one another with pity and compassion, and see the other as people like ourselves, struggling with difficult problems they (like us) are often unable to handle. All of this was possible because they were raised up and set back into life again, to handle the same problems, but with a different outlook. This is all possible because we have been made into new creations, and we no longer look at people the same way - our sight has been changed, not by our insight, but by something God has done in us. And that change didn't happen automatically, or because we came here to worship for many years. We learn to love the unlovable because we find ourselves, unexpectedly, loved. And to be loved, well, that simply breeds more love, so that we can love people even if we disagree with them, even if they seek to hurt us still. THAT is a miracle indeed.

The second now-possible act for the Christian is the ability to endure the unendurable. People with Christ inside can face tremendous obstacles with a confidence and a determination that would crush most others. Over the past weeks, I have been privileged to be in prayer with a number of people who are undergoing life crushing problems. I was with one of our couples in prayer - the wife has a serious medical condition, and the husband sat next to her, holding her hand, and said that many

years ago he had promised to take care of her, and he had always done so, but this was a problem he couldn't take care of, and so we came to prayer together. And after the team prayed, you could see the changed look in his eyes, as he was reminded by the community around him, by us, that the Lord sustains and gives hope and provides power to endure because of the power released in him by a risen Lord.

Third, there are some who now have the possibility to achieve the unachievable. I have spoken with some of those involved in New Focus. When people are over their head in deep water, panic sets - the horizon seems vast and without support, or night comes and we feel very, very alone. But when salt is introduced to food, the taste improves, and we are salt, the salt of Jesus who made us alive and raised us up with him, and some of the people of New Focus have seen a great lighthouse on the water, and through the salt and lifejackets and rescue boats piloted by others already grabbed by Jesus, we have given to these people a new vision, a new possibility. In our youth group, some young people have experienced new life, new faith, and are reaching for a future that will change the direction they would have gone without a new approach and a new power. They will speak with confidence to their peers, or to college professors, for in knowing what they believe, they know who they are.

Fourth, to be made alive with Christ and to be raised up with Christ means the Christian has the ability to forgive the unforgivable. We've had some amazing experiences with this over the past several years. When Christ is within, a new capability enters our lives to hear the other, and to let go of the voices of the past. I know a person here who is learning how to live with a voice from the past that says, 'You are stupid, you are so stupid.' This person has begun to hear another voice, faint at first, and to recognize that this other, newer voice, is the voice of Jesus, saying, 'No, you are lovable. I died for you. I love you in a way that is so much more powerful than that old voice, that old script. Look to me when you hear that old voice. My power is greater than the power in this world.'

I am speaking of the power of resurrection life. The power of resurrection life confounds the calculations of men and women, transforms the depraved, and dissolves the problems of life. Resurrection power works differently. It means that the true Christian comes at life with a different attitude which often baffles and bewilders people.

There is a third major factor involved in our basic relationship with Christ - part of our true identity. The first major factor is that we have been made alive with Christ, and the second was that we have been raised up with him The third major factor is found in verse 6, that we have been made to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. What does that mean? Well, it says in several places in Scripture, that Jesus is said to have been raised up and made to sit at the right hand of God (Hebrews 1:13; 10:12-13). So why does Scripture use this language? I mean, does it mean he sits up somewhere in a chair, waiting? No, I don't think so. It's a picture, a symbol of something. Sitting means the end of work and the end of strain. It's a picture of what the Scriptures call 'rest.'

***Sitting* implies dependence upon another. If you were working away at digging a hole - sweating and straining and tired and exhausted - and I came along and said, 'Look, why don't you take a rest? I'll take over,' what YOU expect ME to do? Would you expect me to exhort and encourage you to try harder, get a sharper shovel, dig deeper? Of course not. If I meant what I said, I would want you to get out of the hole and let me take the shovel while you sat down and relaxed. I would do the work. So this is the picture drawn for us of what a Christian is to do. The Christian is to live as seated with Christ in the 'heavenly realms' (NIV). Having done what Jesus asks us to do, we are to sit down and rest, relax, and let him bear the pressure and the problems.**

And THIS is about the most amazingly difficult aspect of Christianity for a Christian to grasp. We have difficult issues to resolve here at CPC. The other night we had a meeting where we discussed worship and music. Difficult things were said. Some people left the meeting discouraged. Yet, even the mistake we make is often the seed-ground of a turning point which produces good results. And that's because it isn't up to us to maneuver and manipulate to obtain the proper results. We are dealing with a God who has announced that he has ways of working which go beyond what we are able to do. He has told us that he is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

Do you see what this does to life? It turns it into an adventure! You never know what any situation is going to lead to because a creative God, beginning to work in the most ordinary circumstances, can suddenly make them break wide open, and you have something on your hands which staggers you, which you never dreamed could happen, and which even alarms you, so vast are its possibilities. This is the kind of God we have, and this is what it means to sit - to expect him to do this, and to rest, and not be anxious and struggling and straining and striving and frantic.

The Lord tells us that his work is like a farmer going out to sow his seed. The farmer scatters his seed, and then what? Jesus says he goes home and goes to bed - rests, just relaxes and lets the seed grow, because that's the nature of seeds. The farmer knows that the seeds has to go through a process involving time - you must allow it to decay, to deteriorate, to fall apart, and then out of that comes a new life, a new plant. God announces that this way is his way of working. And he urges us to understand that the result is certain, that we can rest and be patient and not be anxious, knowing that he is working out his purposes. We are seated with him in the heavenly realms.

Three final points. First, this is true Christianity. Anything else is a fraud and a sham. Any effort to try to be 'religious' or 'Christian' which doesn't stem from these three major factors - being made alive in Christ, being raised with new power, and being put back into life to rest in his activity and the certainty of his accomplishing his work, is a counterfeit of the Christian life. If you don't have these three factors as part of your life in Christ, you are seeking godliness without God, Christianity without Christ, and spirituality without the Spirit.

Second, these three major factors are already true of every regenerated Christian. They aren't something you try to make true - they are already true. Now, they may not be your experience yet because of two details: (1) ignorance - you might not have begun to experience this because you were unaware of this relationship. Most of us don't have much understanding of it. We don't approach our problems this way. So we need to learn more about it; (2) it may not be true in your experience because you love the pleasures the flesh can give you more than those of the Spirit - we all love the self-effort, the self-pleasing, self-indulgent life, we love these, we choose them at times, but when we do, we must remember we haven't lost the three-fold relationship with Christ, and we can always return to it. It's not something temporary. It's a permanent fixture in our life. God will take his sons and daughters back.

And the third and final point is this - we discover that this relationship becomes observable and actual by faith, that is, by actually living and acting on the basis of these three major factors of our basic relationship with Christ. That's what faith is - to employ these realities in the actual conditions of life. This isn't armchair theology - there are no easy choices here. We are called on to obey these facts when the flesh within us is screaming for revenge, or when the heart faints with discouragement and despair and we are ready to give up, or when the temptation to be lustful or bitter or sarcastic sweeps over us in waves

and we can only claim this relationship for moments at a time and must renew it again and again until at last we enter into some degree of calm and quiet.

It is a battle, but it's possible to win. Because we are alive in Christ. I am not the same person. I am no longer what I once was. I may not be what I ought to be, but thank God I am not what I was! I am alive in Christ and I am raised with him. I have a new power at my disposal - the power of his life in me. Therefore I can rest. I can step out and say and do the right thing, and expect him to accomplish the results. I can relax. I don't have to strain. I can leave the problem of solving the difficult situations in his hands, and I will wait for the ultimate and certain result.

When I do this, I have learned to let God be God in me. This is the way it works. This is the way the life of God is released in the human situation. This is our identity from now on. This is who we *are*. Galatians 2:20 says it best: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

Copyright © 2001 Community Presbyterian Church, Vacaville, All rights reserved.